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NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY
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RUSSIA'S NEXT REVOLUTION: RECLAIMING LOST FREEDOM

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Joint Advanced Warfighting School in partial satisfaction of the requirements of a Master of Science Degree in Joint Campaign Planning and Strategy. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Joint Forces Staff College or the Department of Defense.

This paper is entirely my own work except as documented in footnotes (or appropriate statement per the Academic Integrity Policy).

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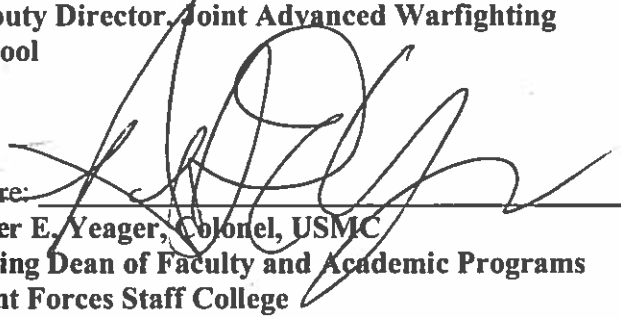
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ABSTRACT

In the 1990's Russia embraced liberal democratic principles, collaborated internationally, and granted its citizens unprecedented freedoms. More recently, the Russian government has engaged in provocative military actions in rejection of Western ideals while simultaneously reversing its transparency, repressing its people, controlling the media, acting aggressively toward former Soviet states, and seeking to usurp world order while propagating its own nefarious narrative. The Russian government today is in a weaker position than many realize due to social challenges, geopolitical ambitions, and severe economic trouble, which could lead to unrest and even revolution. This paper reviews Russia's historical propensity for revolutionary change, discusses changes to Russian citizens' freedoms, and explains how and why a revolution might occur. It concludes with recommendations on how to reestablish Western partnerships with Russia to promote stability while recognizing legitimate security, political, economic, and domestic concerns as well as its unique relationship with its near abroad.

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DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to my wife and my boys. Without your patience, support, and love, my work on this paper would not have been possible. You have given me this opportunity so that my time spent in the JAWS Program has been one of profound discovery, which has meaningfully informed my worldview and opened my mind to new possibilities. During my studies, I came across a pertinent line in a letter that President John Adams wrote to his wife (letter to Abigail Adams, May 20, 1780) “I must study politics and war that my sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy.” As a diplomat and an optimist, I think that we will someday evolve to that point where the study of war becomes less relevant to global relations. Let us hope that day will be sooner rather than later.

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RUSSIA'S NEXT REVOLUTION: RECLAIMING LOST FREEDOM

Chapter 1: Introduction

Revolution is when the unthinkable occurs because it must; when people decide that the risks involved in fighting for change are less fearful than the risks involved in not fighting for it.

Laurie Penny, Journalist¹

During a brief period of hope and expectation at the end of the Cold War, Russia transitioned from the closed government of USSR to become a more free society. However, more recently it has reversed its course back toward authoritarianism. The world no longer sees Russia as a burgeoning democracy and partner. This is a modern-day tragedy. It is a tragedy not only because Russia is no longer part of the global democratic order, but also because its policies directly challenge the United States and the West. Sadly, Russia has taken several steps backward on its course through history, due primarily to its self-serving autocracy.

Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin's regime has been in power since 1999. He circumvented the Russian constitution by serving one term nominally as Prime Minister in order to allow him to remain in power and restart presidential term limits.² Putin's regime seems intent upon eliminating the democratic freedoms gained after the fall of the USSR in 1991. Under Putin, Russia has re-emerged as a threat, not only to Ukraine and its other neighbors, but also to the West by engaging in a number of

¹ New Statesman, "What does Revolution Mean to You?" *New Statesman* 142, no. 5181 (October 25, 2013): 43, <http://www.newstatesman.com/2013/10/what-does-revolution-mean-you> (accessed September 7, 2016).

² Country Watch, "Russia – 2016 Country Review," Country Watch Incorporated (2016), 50-53, <http://www.countrywatch.com/Intelligence/CountryReviews?CountryId=142> (accessed October 7, 2016).

provocative international actions. The Obama administration described these actions as bullying because Putin's government continues to challenge Western goals and democratic developments in the former Soviet republics and beyond.³

Within its own borders, the Russian government has created repressive rule and is attempting to mold an ultra-nationalistic society to further its interests. Putin's regime quashes vocal opposition, cracks down on protesters, and has virtually eliminated free Russian media in favor of Kremlin-controlled press. Russian nationalism espouses xenophobia, marginalizes minority groups, and confines religion to Russian Orthodoxy manipulated by the regime.⁴ Putin convinced most Russians that his revanchist policy that created a rift with the West is simply "righting a historical wrong."⁵ He also claims to be protecting Russians from "Russophobia," an unsubstantiated, irrational fear of all things Russian, and against the wicked ends of the West, in particular the United States.⁶

The current geopolitical situation with regard to Russian recalcitrance toward the West begs a number of questions. Is this return to repressive nationalism and revanchism a permanent condition? Is this path inevitable, or is there a chance for Russia to become a contributing member of the global community again? Did Russia's brief exposure to democracy have any positive impact? Will the Russian government recognize its folly

³ Barrack Obama, "Remarks by President Obama at [the] 25th Anniversary of Freedom Day -- Warsaw, Poland," *Whitehouse.gov*, The White House Office of the Press Secretary, June 4, 2014, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/06/04/remarks-president-obama-25th-anniversary-freedom-day-warsaw-poland> (accessed December 21, 2016).

⁴ Arkady Ostrovsky, *The Invention of Russia: From Gorbachev's Freedom to Putin's War* (New York: Viking, 2015), 312-313.

⁵ Neil MacFarquhar, "From Crimea, Putin Trumpets Mother Russia," *The New York Times*, online version, May 9, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/10/world/europe/russia-celebrates-victory-day.html> (accessed December 19, 2016).

⁶ Lucian Kim, "The Great Debate: Do You Suffer from Russophobia? The Kremlin Thinks You Might," *Reuters*: Edition United States, Reuters News Agency, (March 7, 2016), <http://blogs.reuters.com/great-debate/2016/03/07/do-you-suffer-from-russophobia-the-kremlin-thinks-you-might/> (accessed October 11, 2016).

and re-engage constructively with the rest of the world and support its own people? Is there any reason for hope?

This paper attempts to answer these questions and its thesis argues that the Russian government's return to authoritarianism and continued repression of freedoms could result in the Russian people demanding their rights back through a revolution and regime change. If this happens, it could lead to political instability in Russia, which would create significant challenges as well as opportunities for the U.S. and its allies. The U.S. government must consider this potentiality in advance in order to help support Russia to resolve the situation in a constructive way.

A number of factors, more closely analyzed later, contribute to this hypothesis. Russia pursues seemingly imperialistic geopolitical ambitions through military force, which, apart from Crimea, is not particularly popular inside Russia according to polls.⁷ The government represses citizens and political opponents. It also encourages extreme nationalism through suspect patriotism.⁸ This contributes to domestic insecurity because people and activities considered immoral by the regime become targets of ultranationalists. Sanctions in response to Russian military aggression combined with falling oil prices created major economic setbacks in Russia.⁹ Russians cannot ignore the fallout caused detrimental governmental policies because of the direct impact that it has on their lives. The question is how and when they might react.

⁷ Michael Birnbaum, "How to Understand Putin's Jaw-Droppingly High Approval Ratings" *The Washington Post* (March 6, 2016), https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/how-to-understand-putins-jaw-droppingly-high-approval-ratings/2016/03/05/17f5d8f2-d5ba-11e5-a65b-587e721fb231_story.html?utm_term=.7df2089539a1 (accessed November 14, 2016).

⁸ Ostrovsky, 314-320.

⁹ Sergei Guriev, "Russia's Constrained Economy," *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 3: 18-22 (2016): 18-19, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2016-04-18/russias-constrained-economy> (accessed October 15, 2016).

1.1. The Problem

By regressing into a more autocratic form of government, the Putin regime has created several problems domestically, regionally, and internationally. The government has steadily eroded the rights of its citizens, violated the sovereignty of other nations, and challenged Western ideals. The Russian government is now a threat to its own people, its neighbors, and even the free world. The United States and its allies must find a way to reverse this trend.

The first problem is that the Russian government harms its people by taking away rights that its society has had since the fall of the Soviet Union. Since 2012, the right to free speech, including free assembly, has been restricted. The government suppressed protests for fair elections when citizens challenged election fraud, effectively making protests illegal. The Russian government restricted the press and internet, nearly eliminating free Russian media.¹⁰ Russians ability to travel is now restricted, although this is primarily just for government employees who work in the security sector.¹¹

The next problem is that the Russian government poses a threat to its immediate neighbors. Former U.S. President Barack Obama described Putin as a bully.¹² Putin's regime used its energy monopoly to blackmail Europe, in particular Ukraine, for over a decade.¹³ Russia continues to support oligarchs, corruption, and criminal behavior. Russia is presumed responsible for cyber-attacks against several Western countries, in

¹⁰ Lilia Shevtsova, "The Authoritarian Resurgence: Forward to the Past in Russia," *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 2 (April 2015): 30, <http://www.journalofdemocracy.org/article/authoritarian-resurgence-forward-past-russia> (accessed September 18, 2016).

¹¹ Interfax, "Travel Restrictions on Russian Defense, Security and Law Enforcement Officials Remain in Place," *Interfax: Russia & CIS Military Newswire*: 1 (July 30, 2014).

¹² Obama.

¹³ Country Watch, 38-41.

particular Estonia and the U.S., allegedly to influence the 2016 elections. Among other provocations, Russia engages in intimidation through military exercises along its western border, which is now the NATO-Russia border.¹⁴

The final problem is that Putin seems to follow an irresponsible revanchist policy, challenging the current world order through aggression. Before initiating military operations, Russia supported a pro-Kremlin Ukrainian crony until ousted during the pro-European Maidan protests. Beyond its illegal annexation of Crimea, Russia continues to engage in violence in Eastern Ukraine.¹⁵ Even earlier, Russia challenged overtures by former Soviet territories to become more westernized in international structures. Putin quashed hope for Chechen autonomy with overwhelming military force. Around Georgia, he began a now worldwide campaign to *protect* Russians against unproven discrimination.¹⁶ Russia has used threatening rhetoric about nuclear power not heard since the Cold War. The Russian government has also violated treaties and agreements.¹⁷

Despite its emergence as a threat, Russia still cooperates in some situations. It allowed the Northern Distribution Network, the coalition logistics lifeline into Afghanistan, to operate through Russia.¹⁸ Russia was a key participant in successful nuclear negotiations with Iran. Russia also signed the new START Treaty.¹⁹ Although Russia's role in Syria is rightly questioned due to its pro-Assad stance, at first, it halted the use of weapons of mass destruction, arranged cease fires, and fought terrorists, albeit with significant collateral damage.²⁰ Following the 2016 U.S. elections, Putin offered to

¹⁴ Ibid., 474-475.

¹⁵ Ibid., 369-370.

¹⁶ Ibid., 175.

¹⁷ Ibid., 202-203.

¹⁸ Ibid., 72.

¹⁹ Ibid., 335-337.

²⁰ Ibid., 362.

re-engage, which may provide the best opportunity to reestablish relations and provide constructive influence within his geopolitical sphere.

1.2. What is to be Done?²¹

The previous section introduced this paper's thesis and describes the Russian government's policies, which are a threat to its citizens, neighboring countries, and the rest of the world. The next section outlines how the topic will be analyzed. Following this outline, the final section discusses key terminology like "revolution" and "revanchism" in order to explain how these concepts apply in this analysis.

The second chapter presents a timeline that describes how Russia's turbulent past has a propensity for revolution rather than smooth transitions between governments. Next, it provides context from the *perestroika* period onward and describes Russia's current challenges. It then describes problematic issues in Russia today, including the systematic implementation of state control, the concept of "*Novorosiya*" (New Russia) or "Putin's War."²² It analyzes the problems that this creates including an increase in Russia's extreme nationalism, systematic political and social repression, economic, and other challenges. It then discusses the core hypothesis that Russia's current trajectory may lead to regime change. The government reduces personal freedoms and creates other problems through policy objectives, which could be a catalyst for revolutionary change. Another catalyst might be growing frustration caused by economic instability and repression caused by Putin's regime. This could boil over into a revolution, ultimately

²¹ This subtitle comes from the title of the book of the same name written by 19th Century Russian writer/philosopher Nikolai Chernyshevskiy, which contemplates the future of Russia.

²² Ostrovsky, 317.

triggering the creation of a new government.

The third chapter considers what might drive Russian society to demand a change in government, including the repression of citizens' rights, the effects of nationalistic and artificial values, economic challenges, and other serious issues. It also discusses protests and government opposition to them, the challenges caused by media restrictions, and a discussion of revolutions in the former Soviet space. A trajectory toward a Russian revolution is not necessarily predestined, however. It concludes with a description of positive signals by the regime that demonstrate potential reforms are possible. The fact that Russia still cooperates in some fora offers some hope. Russians still enjoy more liberties today than during the pre-Gorbachev Soviet Union. The regime's poor record requires the West to proceed with caution, sustain a robust defense, and maintain a deterrent posture. However, it is still possible that the regime may cooperate.

The fourth chapter discusses potential challenges to this thesis, including the Putin regime's ability to eliminate opposition. It analyzes whether or not this government can succeed as Russia's previous governments have through repressive means. It also discusses what might motivate the Russian people to challenge their government.

The final chapter discusses what conclusions can be drawn from this research and offers recommendations on areas of cooperation, potential incentives, and new areas of partnership to consider while continuing to encourage democratic reforms. The West must continue to staunchly deter revanchist policies and threats to personal freedoms. However, proactive engagement will be the best path toward a more productive relationship with the ultimate goal that Russia will be collaborative global partner again.

1.3. What is Revolution?

Subjective views of what “revolution” means persist due to individual perceptions, personal experiences, and historical views. When *New Statesman* magazine asked several thinkers, dissidents, and artists for their personal definitions of revolution, all describe an emotive condition based on individual context.²³ In this paper, “revolution” does not imply that force or violence are inherent to change a government or its policies, although this has occurred. Indeed violent transitions are fairly common throughout Russia’s history. The key principle in the term discussed here is that there must be some or all of the following elements: a power struggle, a substantial change in the government’s ideology, demonizing a predecessor, and/or irregular ascension, which this paper argues is a particularly common propensity in all Russian transfers of power over the past century.

Some other terms should be clarified as well. In this paper, “territorial aggression,” “neo-imperialism,” and “imperialism” refer to “revanchism” defined by Oxford as “a policy of seeking to retaliate, especially to recover lost territory.”²⁴ Although Russia may not be seeking territory or influence beyond the former Soviet borders, the government’s ultimate intentions are not completely clear. “Misinformation” is expressed in many different terms, including “disinformation,” “propaganda,” and “the Russian narrative.” The most important element is that it is false information intended to produce a desired political effect for the Russian government.

²³ *New Statesman*, 38-43.

²⁴ Oxford Online Dictionary, Oxford Living Dictionaries (2016), <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/revanchism> (accessed September 24, 2016).

Chapter 2: Historical Perspective, Background and Context

God save us from seeing a Russian revolt, senseless and merciless. Those who plot impossible upheavals among us are either young and do not know our people, or are cruel men who do not care a bit about the lives of others and even hold their own lives cheap.

Alexander Pushkin, Russian Poet¹

This chapter provides a historical perspective in order to evaluate Russia's history of revolutions to demonstrate the propensity for revolutionary ideological change. It provides background that describes Russia's unique experience over the past 30 years and the significant and revolutionary changes in its government. Lastly, it provides context of the situation in Russia today in order to develop a better sense of what is happening and what can be expected in the future, including the possibility of revolution.

2.1. A Revolutionary History

When considering Russia's history and transition between leaders, it is clear that revolution is not only common, but almost a tradition. Before the 20th Century, transitions of power were the result of the previous ruler's death with few exceptions. Certainly among monarchies and other autocratic governments death is simply a normal progression and not necessarily revolutionary. Russian tsarist successions frequently involved assassinations, intrigue, and political resolve, perhaps more so than in other European monarchies.² Many of these transitions between monarchs meet this paper's

¹ Gary Rosenshield, *Pushkin and the Genres of Madness: The Masterpieces of 1833*, (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1 edition, 2003), 174-175, excerpt from the unpublished chapter of Alexander Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter*, 1836.

² Country Watch, "Russia – 2016 Country Review," Country Watch Incorporated (2016), 10-16, <http://www.countrywatch.com/Intelligence/CountryReviews?CountryId=142> (accessed October 7, 2016).

definition of revolution, which implies a power struggle, a substantial change in the government's ideology, demonizing a predecessor, and/or irregular ascension during the transfer of power. But this type of revolution was almost always part of the power transition in Russia after the tsars until today.

The 20th Century was truly a century of revolutions in Russia. After the Russian Revolution of 1905, sparked by the heavy-handedness of tsarist troops, Tsar Nicholas II conceded to create a nominally parliamentary monarchy to appease the populace. But without any real change, discontent grew, marking the beginning of the end for the Russian Empire. The Russian Revolution in 1917 and subsequent civil war led to real ideological change, an end to Tsarist Russia, and the execution of the Tsar.³

The Russian Revolution eventually led to the creation of the Soviet Union.⁴ However, the Soviet Union must also be considered in the context of its leadership because it was not simply a continuum of ideology from World War I through the end of the Cold War. Most transitions between leaders were quite revolutionary in certain aspects, and successors usually represented a significant change in ideology from predecessors. Analyses of Soviet leaders reveal stark differences. Significant power plays resulted in major ideological changes between governments.

Following brief provisional governments, Vladimir Lenin led the Bolsheviks during the Revolution, helped create the USSR, and became its first leader. After Lenin's death in 1924, Joseph Stalin's rise to power was a revolution within the government. Stalin's ruthless tenacity and fanatical ideology helped him secure his position as the Soviet Union's leader. Stalin's rule was that of a cruel dictator, and his dogma was a

³ Ibid., 15-17.

⁴ Ibid.

significant departure from Lenin's vision. After Stalin's death in 1953, Georgy Malenkov was the successor to all his titles, but Nikita Khrushchev defeated Malenkov in a power struggle just over a year later. Khrushchev rejected 30 years of Stalin's vicious purges, and directed a "thaw" from the USSR's grim past. Khrushchev also had blood on his hands, but his policies led the country in a much less brutal direction. In 1964 another revolutionary movement within the Communist party stripped Khrushchev's power and made Leonid Brezhnev the Soviet leader. Brezhnev's new ideology sought détente with the West but was mostly associated with nearly 20 years of economic stagnation until his death in 1982. Three years later, after the quick successions of Yuriy Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko, who both died shortly after assuming office, Mikhail Gorbachev became the last Soviet leader from 1985 to 1991.⁵

Although Gorbachev's ascension was not revolutionary *per se*, his politics were. Gorbachev came up through the Party but represented a new generation. Through his new ideas and policies, Gorbachev ended the USSR's isolation from the West and set the stage for Russia's brief democracy. Emboldened by reform from 1990 to 1991 several Soviet republics declared independence from the USSR. Despite his support for Gorbachev during a counterrevolutionary *coup d'état* in 1991, President of the Russian Republic Boris Yeltsin helped dissolve the Soviet Union later that year. Afterwards, Yeltsin was elected President of the independent Russian Federation in a reasonably free election with significant popular support.⁶ However, when the *Duma* (parliament) challenged Yeltsin, he became more authoritarian with "supreme powers" from the 1993

⁵ Ibid., 15-19.

⁶ Ibid., 19-21.

constitution.⁷ Losing popularity domestically while coping with declining health, alcoholism, and being viewed as the West's puppet, Yeltsin passed his authority to Vladimir Putin in 1999. Somewhat *pro forma* elections confirmed Putin's presidency, and thus began Putin's kleptocracy and cronyism.⁸ In 2004 Putin won by a landslide in a highly questionable election.⁹ In 2008 Dmitry Medvedev became President, but in reality, his presidency was largely symbolic since Putin became Prime Minister, which allowed him to circumvent constitutional limits.¹⁰ In 2012 Putin was re-elected President in a skewed election and reversed many of Medvedev's reforms, displaying his supremacy.¹¹ Putin will likely run for a fourth six-year term in 2018, his last unless he bypasses the constitution yet again.

The succession of leaders in Russia for over a century demonstrates a clear pattern of revolution – either the method, the ideology, or both have almost always been revolutionary. New rulers dominate Russian politics and policy to an extreme, disregarding the laws and often reinterpreting history. Putin is no exception and his government has changed the law, including the constitution, and has re-written history to meet his agenda as well as the agenda of his cronies.

2.2. The Russian Experience after Perestroika

In contrast with the previous section, which demonstrates Russia's revolutionary tendencies through history, this section provides more detail and context of the current

⁷ Arkady Ostrovsky, *The Invention of Russia: From Gorbachev's Freedom to Putin's War* (New York: Viking, 2015): 162.

⁸ Country Watch, 21-29.

⁹ Ibid., 32.

¹⁰ Ibid., 51-52.

¹¹ Ibid., 86-87.

state of affairs in Russia.

Despite encouraging change under his leadership, Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev did not anticipate the end of the Soviet Union. He recognized that it was time to join the global community and introduced revolutionary new ideas: *perestroika* (restructuring) and *glasnost* (openness). But some changes came faster than expected. The Berlin Wall fell, and Soviet citizens could do things that they never could before. Media was free. People could, and did, demonstrate. People could travel more, and property ownership was becoming possible. The level of freedom in Russia was unprecedented.¹²

But the government could not keep up with the pace of these great changes, and the economy nearly collapsed. All consumer goods and food items were in *defitsit* – nothing was available. One of the people's new freedoms was the ability to criticize the government, and they did. Most blamed Gorbachev for the country's problems without recognizing that they were largely the result of failed Soviet policies.¹³ Ironically, Time magazine's man of the decade was despised in his own country.

After a half century of Cold War, Gorbachev in his final address on December 25, 1991, expressed hope for a better, freer Russia.

Free elections have become a reality. Free press, freedom of worship, representative legislatures and a multi-party system have all become reality. Human rights are...the supreme principle...As the economy is being steered toward the market format...the intention...is the well-being of man...We're now living in a new world. An end has been put to the Cold War and to the arms race, as well as to the mad militarization of the country, which has crippled our economy, public attitudes and morals...We opened up ourselves to the rest of the world, abandoned the practices of interfering in others' internal affairs and using troops outside this country, and we were reciprocated with trust, solidarity,

¹² Ostrovsky, 54-68.

¹³ Country Watch, 20-21.

and respect...I consider it vitally important to preserve the democratic achievements which have been attained in the last few years. We have paid with all our history...for these democratic achievements...not to be abandoned, whatever the circumstances... Otherwise, all our hopes for the best will be buried... We are heirs of a great civilization and it now depends on all and everyone whether or not this civilization will make a comeback to a new and decent living...I am positive that sooner or later, some day our common efforts will bear fruit and our nations will live in a prosperous, democratic society...I wish everyone all the best.¹⁴

With that, the USSR ceased to exist, and soon after, Russian flags flew over the Kremlin.

Great expectations and a belief that anything could happen marked this new era.

President Boris Yeltsin had orchestrated Russia's secession from the USSR, which led to its ultimate demise. As Russian Federation President, Yeltsin espoused democratic ideals, yet when challenged, he consolidated power. He illegally dissolved the parliament in 1993 and many reforms were forcibly implemented. Regardless, Yeltsin's successful elections were relatively non-controversial. As his drinking increased, Russians largely considered him to be a national embarrassment. Yeltsin, in a declining state of health, appointed his successor, Vladimir Putin in 1999.¹⁵ Putin called the Soviet Union's collapse, "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century."¹⁶ Putin, despite Dmitry Medvedev's one-term presidency, has remained in power since. In that time, he has slowly eliminated opposition and currently exercises complete authority.

2.3. Russia Today

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia went through a relatively short

¹⁴ Mikhail Gorbachev, "End of the Soviet Union; Text of Gorbachev's Farewell Address," *The New York Times*, December 26, 1991, <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/26/world/end-of-the-soviet-union-text-of-gorbachev-s-farewell-address.html?pagewanted=all> (accessed November 26, 2016).

¹⁵ Country Watch, 20-25.

¹⁶ NBC News.com, "Putin: Soviet Collapse 'A Genuine Tragedy,'" *NBC News.com*, World News edition, Associated Press, April 25, 2005, http://www.nbcnews.com/id/7632057/ns/world_news/t/putin-soviet-collapse-genuine-tragedy/#.WFhYILLR_IU (accessed December 19, 2016).

democratic period, and then returned to a more authoritarian government. According to Freedom House, Russia's government declined from its "nearly free" rating in 1991 to become solidly among the "not free" rated nations in recent years.¹⁷ Unfortunately, the Russian Federation seems to become more authoritarian with each passing year. After more than sixteen years, President Vladimir Putin's government has created a climate of increased corruption, extreme nationalism, political oppression, and imperialism.¹⁸ These problems worsen over time.

When considering the Russian threat, most think of the illegal annexation of Crimea through surreptitious actions against Ukraine and the subsequent armed conflict in eastern Ukraine. However, several other military provocations before the Ukrainian conflict foreshadowed Russian aspirations. Shortly after assuming power, Putin's regime crushed Chechen rebels militarily, destroying any hopes of autonomy.¹⁹ Military incursions into Georgia under the nationalist pretext of protecting Russians in South Ossetia and Abkhazia were clear demonstrations of Russian intentions to maintain its sphere of influence.²⁰ Finally, the occupation and annexation of Crimea was the epitome of Russia's false narrative, playing on nationalist sentiments of protecting ethnic Russians from Ukrainian fascists while provoking violent instability in Eastern Ukraine.²¹ These actions, however, highlighted Russian security concerns within its geopolitical sphere.

The Russian government's revanchism in reclaiming Crimea created the most

¹⁷ Freedom House, "Freedom in the World Comparative and Historical Data: Individual Country Ratings and Status, FIW 1973-2016, Russia." Freedom House (2016), <https://freedomhouse.org/report-types/freedom-world> (accessed September 24, 2016).

¹⁸ Lilia Shevtsova, "The Authoritarian Resurgence: Forward to the Past in Russia," *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 2 (April 2015): 22-25, <http://www.journalofdemocracy.org/article/authoritarian-resurgence-forward-past-russia> (accessed September 18, 2016).

¹⁹ Country Watch, 408-413.

²⁰ Ibid., 444-453.

²¹ Ostrovsky, 313-320.

direct multilateral challenge to the international community, threatening Ukraine and creating global anxiety. This made the threat more serious to the U.S. and NATO leadership, in particular for the countries that border Russia immediately to the West. These are some of the newest NATO allies, and Russia's actions represent a new set of challenges. The U.S. and the EU implemented economic sanctions against Russia as a retaliatory measure for its illegal occupation and annexation of Crimea and violence in Eastern Ukraine. Russia enacted counter-sanctions, which really only exacerbated its own consumer goods and food shortages. Sanctions combined with the precipitous fall in oil prices devastated the economy and the standard of living in Russia.²²

The Russian government antagonizes the West in other ways too. It expelled many international non-governmental organizations as "foreign agents" accused of working against the government under new laws.²³ In addition to maintaining alliances with notorious regimes of the world, Putin's government conducts threatening military exercises immediately adjacent to NATO allies.²⁴

Despite a myriad of economic and geopolitical challenges, the Russian government's continued response is systematic repression of the media, crack downs on protestors, closures of non-governmental organizations, and state-sponsored patriotism, which often disguises discrimination.²⁵ Russia's predilection for change through revolution might mean that unless the government seeks a more moderate trajectory, the growing internal and international pressure could eventually lead to regime change. These policies require a consideration of the government's thinking relative to its actions.

²² Ibid., 172-174.

²³ Shevtsova, "Forward to the Past," 28

²⁴ Country Watch, 474-475.

²⁵ Ostrovsky, 5.

2.4. Russian Government Ideology – Putin’s Worldview and Lost Freedoms

Yeltsin declared Putin as his successor as president, and on December 30, 1999, Putin issued a long detailed perspective, explaining his doctrine. The excerpt below describes his position that Russia must be a strong state.

We have a state, whose institutions and structures have always played a crucial role in the life of the country and its people. A strong state is not an anomaly for Russians, not something to fight against, but rather the source and guarantor of order, the initiator and main driving force of any change...Our society wants to restore the state’s directing and regulatory role to the extent that it is necessary, on the basis of tradition and the present situation of the country.²⁶

2.4.1. Putin’s Strategic Conservatism²⁷

Considering Russia’s relationship with the rest of the world, Russologists may wonder if this era is a new Cold War. Indeed many of the Russian government’s actions seem to be in direct opposition to Western ideals. The academic writers in this chapter discuss these recent changes in Russian government policy and certain patterns emerge: extreme nationalism, cronyism, rampant corruption, conservative Russian values, revanchism, and anti-Westernism (anti-Americanism). Journalist Melik Kaylan describes this ideology as “strategic conservatism,” which largely represents a return to Russian historical values, real or not, as defined by Putin himself.²⁸

Putin created a new climate in the world today. For the West it appears to be confrontational, yet for many Russians a new sense of nationalism has swept their country. Arkady Ostrovsky, a Russian-born journalist, chronicles Russia’s recent turn

²⁶ Vladimir Putin, “Rossiya na rubezhye tysyacheletiy” (Russia on the Threshold of the Millennium), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, (December 30, 1999), http://www.ng.ru/politics/1999-12-30/4_millenium.html (accessed October 8, 2016).

²⁷ Melik Kaylan, “Kremlin Values: Putin's Strategic Conservatism,” *World Affairs* 177, no. 1 (May/June 2014): 9, <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/kremlin-values-putin%E2%80%99s-strategic-conservatism> (accessed September 18, 2016).

²⁸ Ibid.

backwards noting Russia's "former KGB man for president...who began to bring back the Cold War order."²⁹ He points out that Russian nationalism "in neo-Stalinist garb" has become a powerful threat to its citizens and neighbors, but that Russia is still not the Soviet Union.³⁰ Ostrovsky recognizes Putin's responsibility, but he also acknowledges the president is also a result of Russia's many problems.³¹

Nationalism in the Russian context is significant. Peter Mentzel of the Liberty Fund contrasts "nationality/national identity" and "nationalism/nationalistic." National identity often embodies cultural heritage, whereas nationalism is associated with ethnicity or xenophobia.³² Today Russian nationalism relies on pseudo-historical ideas often fabricated for the government's ends to create a kind of forced patriotism. After *perestroika* Russia sought national identity, but in its quest Putin exploited nationalistic tendencies to support his agenda. Mentzel argues that robust national identity played a crucial role in Eastern European revolutions in the late 1980s, which expanded civil societies and created democratic states. He contrasts pejorative ethnic nationalism, which is pervasive among totalitarian regimes.³³ Therefore, seeking national identity at first may have led Russia toward democracy, but extreme nationalistic policy supports the current autocracy, adding to Russia's identity crisis and backward direction.

Extreme Russian nationalism has a tainted history, including anti-Semitic pogroms.³⁴ Ostrovsky says that the Kremlin incites "traditionalist values of the state and the church" through the arrest of the punk rock group "Pussy Riot," the banning of

²⁹ Ostrovsky, 5.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 6.

³² Peter C. Mentzel, "Nationalism, Civil Society, and the Revolution of 1989," *Nations & Nationalism* 18, no. 4: 624-642 (2012): 625-628.

³³ Ibid., 624-627.

³⁴ Ostrovsky, 319.

homosexual literature, and even denying U.S. families' adoption rights in Russia.³⁵ Julia Sweet of Rutgers University analyzes the church's role noting "in these state-religion bargain games, the Church exchanges its unquestionable endorsement to the oligarch regime for financial stability."³⁶ This nationalist bent has led to xenophobic violence against minority populations: the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community; religious minorities; ethnic minorities; and others considered unpatriotic.³⁷ Whenever acts of violence occur in these situations, due to Russian government complicity, law enforcement response is muted or nonexistent.

The Kremlin promotes nationalism through the contrived concept of Russophobia as pretext and propaganda to challenge the West in Ukraine, the Baltics and Transnistria in Moldova to claim extra-territoriality and provoke unrest. Senior fellow in the Brookings Institution's Foreign Policy Program, Lilia Shevtsova explains that "the Kremlin has pushed ahead...using nationalism in order to strengthen imperialism and even rallying many Russian nationalists to its cause."³⁸ She goes on to say that despite this nationalist position, "the Kremlin will have to come down on the side of the imperial idea" in order to maintain control over its multi-ethnic state.³⁹

Shevtsova notes that in 2014, Putin adopted the Russian nationalists' idea of *Russkiy Mir* (Russian World) in order to consolidate ethnic Russians' support worldwide

³⁵ Ibid., 312.

³⁶ Julia Sweet, "The Russian Orthodox Church and Social Movement Protests: Is Unity Possible?" *International Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Society* 5, no. 4: 77 (2015): 81.

³⁷ David Satter, "Awaiting the Next Revolution," *Wall Street Journal* (May 13, 2012), <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702304363104577390441411574290> (accessed September 18, 2016); Arkady Ostrovsky, *The Invention of Russia: From Gorbachev's Freedom to Putin's War* (New York: Viking, 2015), 312-313.

³⁸ Shevtsova, "Forward to the Past," 26.

³⁹ Ibid.

based on their loyalty to the state.⁴⁰ This supports the regime's policy to retaliate and take back former Soviet territories – Russian revanchism. She says that Crimea is a clear example, and Putin supported the idea of helping all Russian speakers or *Novorossiia* (New Russia) to justify the invasion of Ukraine.⁴¹ Even before Crimea, Shevtsova highlighted Russia's imperialism in the Russo-Georgian conflict and others, "the Kremlin's neo-imperial ambitions...are pursued through efforts to preserve a sphere of interest in the post-Soviet region."⁴² Shevtsova describes Russia as an imperialist "revanchist power."⁴³ Crimea can be viewed in terms of neo-imperialism or nationalism, and Putin capitalized on both. Ostrovsky captures this paradox quoting the Russian president announcing Crimea's illegal annexation in the Kremlin on March 18, 2014.⁴⁴

Putin repeated, almost verbatim, the words that twenty years earlier had been published in the nationalist newspaper *Den'* by Igor Shafarevich, one of the ideologists of Russian nationalism. "Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride. This is the location of ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptized....The graves of Russian soldiers whose bravery brought Crimea into the Russian empire are also in Crimea," Putin said. While it was Prince Vladimir the Great, the tenth-century ruler of Kievan Rus', who had been baptized in Crimea, it was President Vladimir [Putin] who brought the region back into the Russian fold.⁴⁵

Putin in many ways successfully benefits from societal *nostalgiya* (nostalgia for the past) despite the obvious "clash of symbols" of revived Russian orthodoxy and Stalin's national anthem.⁴⁶ Ostrovsky describes the use of symbols from the USSR's past

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Lilia Shevtsova, "The Next Russian Revolution," *Current History* 111, no. 747: 251-257 (2012): 252.

⁴³ Shevtsova, "Forward to the Past," 22.

⁴⁴ Crimea was legally transferred to Ukraine in 1954 under Nikita Khrushchev, possibly to pacify Ukraine after Stalin's murderous tyranny. Stalin's regime forcibly relocated significant Tatar populations, who lived in Crimea for centuries, artificially creating the current ethnic Russian majority (Country Watch, 124-125).

⁴⁵ Ostrovsky, 316.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 269.

as propaganda tools distributed through the media to help develop a coherent ideology.⁴⁷

However, this artificial nationalism creates new problems for the Russian state too.

Although Obama's remark that Russia is a "bully" may seem to be on target, it is really an oversimplification.⁴⁸ Kaylan explains Putin's doctrine of "strategic conservatism" as a policy that imposes conservative Russian values on society in order to gain popular support for government actions.⁴⁹ Shevtsova agrees with Kaylan, calling the first tenet of the Russian government's survival strategy a "conservative revolution."⁵⁰ These values may be largely manufactured but have increased Russian nationalism.

This neo-conservatism supposedly supports traditional Russian values, such as the Orthodox Church, family, and national interests, but in reality legitimizes religious persecution, minority oppression, and territorial aggression. Ostrovsky concurs, quoting Putin, "'Euro-Atlantic countries are turning away from their roots' ... Russia, by contrast, 'has always been...held together by the Russian people, the Russian language, Russian culture and the Russian Orthodox Church.'"⁵¹ Indiana University Associate History Professor Dmitry Shlapentokh adds that "centuries-old Slavophilism...presented Russia as a wholesome Slavic Orthodox country" is the only true Christianity.⁵²

But this Russian neo-nationalism brings back some of the worst of the Soviet experience; Ostrovsky notes that "Soviet nationalism was a noxious compound of anti-

⁴⁷ Ibid., 217-223.

⁴⁸ Barrack Obama. "Remarks by President Obama at [the] 25th Anniversary of Freedom Day – Warsaw, Poland," *Whitehouse.gov*, The White House Office of the Press Secretary, June 4, 2014, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/06/04/remarks-president-obama-25th-anniversary-freedom-day-warsaw-poland> (accessed December 21, 2016).

⁴⁹ Kaylan, 9-10.

⁵⁰ Shevtsova, "Forward to the Past," 22.

⁵¹ Ostrovsky, 312-3.

⁵² Shlapentokh, Dmitry, "The Image of the Russian Revolution on Russian TV" (*Contemporary Review* 294, no. 1706: 289-298 (2012): 290.

Semitism and chauvinism.”⁵³ Kaylan believes that “Vladimir Putin knows what he’s doing” with this ideology, and “he has discovered a significant weapon with which to beat the West and divide its potential allies around the world.”⁵⁴ Along the lines of Obama’s bully remark, Malik notes that even in Russia, “Money, guns, intimidation, and political opportunism only get you so far.”⁵⁵

This political opportunism frequently has worked for the Russian government. Extreme Russian nationalism gives rise to xenophobic anti-Western commentary, both directly and more covertly from the Kremlin. Ostrovsky explains “Putin turned to anti-Americanism as the only ideological tenet that had survived the collapse of the Soviet Union.”⁵⁶ Roger Kanet, Professor in the Department of Political Science of the University of Miami confirms that this is not new. “Beginning about 1995 Russian policy shifted in a more nationalist and assertive direction.”⁵⁷ Shevtsova characterizes this direction as part of the Kremlin’s survival strategy, which is meant to isolate, challenge, and create enmity with the West and its ideals.⁵⁸ However, Shevtsova does not believe that the Russian government is in a stable position. “We can be certain, however, that the Russian system will further degenerate. The leader’s turn toward provocation and war as expedients for survival tells us that the system has exhausted its stability-maintenance mechanisms.”⁵⁹

2.4.2. Freedoms Lost

In Russia in the 1990s, Russians felt like they could do anything, and, indeed,

⁵³ Ostrovsky, 72.

⁵⁴ Kaylan, 16-17.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ostrovsky, 312.

⁵⁷ Roger E. Kanet, “The Failed Western Challenge to Russia’s Revival in Eurasia?” *International Politics* 52, no. 5: 503-522 (2015): 505.

⁵⁸ Shevtsova, “Forward to the Past,” 22.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 34.

many took advantage of this wave of freedom. From 1991-1992, Freedom House evaluated Russia's level of freedom as "partly free," with a 3 rating in Political Rights and a 3 rating in Civil Liberties.⁶⁰ Now, in 2015-2016, the ratings were 6 and 5 respectively, earning an overall rating of "not free" with an indication of a downward trend.⁶¹ The highest rating, indicating the most freedom is 1, and the 1-2 range is considered "free," the 3-5 category is considered "partly free," and 6-7 is "not free."⁶²

This section considers what freedoms that the Russian had but lost under the current regime in recent years. Most notable among these denied freedoms are free speech, the freedom of assembly (protest), unrestricted international travel, and media freedom (including the internet). Although the Russian government has cracked down on these rights, some Russian citizens are able to exercise these rights through other means despite new controls that have been put in place. This is significant considering the increased repression in the country, indicating that the Russian people are willing to challenge the government when they feel strongly enough about an issue.

In late 2011 and early 2012, Russians participated in major protests against electoral fraud. The largest protests were over fraud in *Duma* (Russia's parliament) elections, although protests that occurred in the run up to the Presidential race were significant and directly challenged the regime.⁶³ The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) report on the Presidential election, which the Russian government

⁶⁰ Freedom House, "Individual Country Ratings, Russia."

⁶¹ Country Watch, 268.

⁶² Freedom House, "Individual Country Ratings, Russia."

⁶³ Sweet, Julia, "The Russian Orthodox Church and Social Movement Protests: Is Unity Possible?" *International Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Society* 5, no. 4: 77 (2015): 78-79.

requested, notes that the results were “clearly skewed in favor of one of the contestants.”⁶⁴ Of course, this means Putin. Clearly the government’s strategy of pretending to be democratic as confirmed by an international organization failed.

Russian law officially allowed political protests since the fall of the Soviet Union. However, Shevtsova says that in 2012 the government enacted new laws to prevent protests, restrict activities, and levy hefty fines against participants. To further restrict protests, the government created a system run by the FSB (the KGB’s successor) to monitor the internet because of its central role in protest organization.⁶⁵

As far as international travel, the borders are open for travel and business, but certain groups have more restrictions than others. Notably employees of the defense, law enforcement, and security sectors cannot travel to over 100 mostly Western countries.⁶⁶ Other citizens are restricted from traveling to other countries for political reasons.⁶⁷

In the late 1980’s and 1990’s, freedom of the press in Russia was chaotic, but real. Now, however, the Kremlin has firm control on the media. There is little dissent vocalized in the press these days against the regime for fear of backlash. As a journalist himself, Ostovsky discusses how mass media has always been the Russian government’s instrument to create the socio-political environment.⁶⁸ For the current government, the sinking of the *Kursk*, Russia’s worst submarine disaster, was the turning point when the

⁶⁴ OSCE/ODIHR, “Russian Federation Presidential Election Report Summary,” OSCE/ODIHR, (2012), <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/90469> (accessed October 12, 2016).

⁶⁵ Shevtsova, “Forward to the Past,” 30.

⁶⁶ Interfax, “Travel Restrictions on Russian Defense, Security and Law Enforcement Officials Remain in Place,” *Interfax: Russia & CIS Military Newswire*: 1 (July 30, 2014).

⁶⁷ Corey Flintoff, “Russians Find Favored Holiday Destinations Suddenly Off Limits,” *Weekend All Things Considered*, National Public Radio, Inc., (January 2, 2016), <http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2016/01/02/461595663/russians-find-favored-holiday-destinations-suddenly-off-limits> (accessed October 17, 2016).

⁶⁸ Ostrovsky, 7-8.

state changed tactics and began to treat the media as its enemy.⁶⁹ Ever since then, state control over the media has been cemented to the point that no real media outlets exist in Russia that can give a free, uncensored opinion.

High-profile politicians, government critics, activists, and journalists that opposed Putin's government have been murdered since he took office. Despite clear political linkages with the Russian President, Russia's weak rule of law and autocratic control never yielded criminal proceedings.⁷⁰ Several high profile Kremlin critics have also been jailed. However, in a few cases like punk rock band "Pussy Riot" and billionaire Mikhail Khodorkovsky, international pressure helped secure their release, and in both cases the parties continue to criticize the regime. This is significant because it means that the Russian government will yield to international pressure in some cases.

Although these activities and legal changes intended to quell dissent and control Russian citizens, attitudes have not necessarily changed, nor do they support repression. Commercial Partnership for New Economic Growth President Mikhail Dmitriev conducted a study of Russian attitudes after the protests of 2011-2012. He showed that Russians support the protest movements even more in the years after they took place. He also demonstrated that populations outside of Moscow and Saint Petersburg have much stronger socioeconomic concerns. In cities with over a million residents, people are significantly more likely (over 50 percent) to protest the federal government due to growing perceptions of centralized responsibility for economic problems. Grievances continue to be felt throughout Russia and despite localized differences, the study

⁶⁹ Ibid., 277.

⁷⁰ David Satter, *The Less You Know, the Better You Sleep: Russia's Road to Terror and Dictatorship under Yeltsin and Putin*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 121-131.

indicates that the vast majority (67%) would like to live in a democracy.⁷¹

2.4.3. The Twisted Narrative

The Kremlin has excelled at putting forward a false narrative with surprising success. As Shevtsova puts it, “The Kremlin is especially active in the areas of information warfare and propaganda, both of which are tools.”⁷² The Kremlin’s mouthpiece, RT (previously known as Russia Today, the acronym obscures the fake news source’s origin) with its nearly half billion dollar budget is the second most widely viewed *news* source on YouTube, just after BBC, and is widely viewed in many Western countries.⁷³ Woo Pyung Kyun, a research professor at the Asia-Pacific Research Center at Hanyang University, explains that this Russian propaganda is at the heart of its “hybrid warfare.”⁷⁴ This is a hybrid of disinformation, including cyber effects, inciting militants, tactics, and weapon systems.⁷⁵ Demonstrating how effective Russian disinformation is, Woo explains that Russia mastered psychological warfare in its campaign in Ukraine.⁷⁶

Russian misinformation is effective for several reasons. It appeals to the discontent of the Russian population. Many hear the false narrative and it appeals to their sense of patriotism, while providing an opportunity for the Russian government to blame its problems on the West. It also appeals to ethnic Russians living abroad who may feel disenfranchised, especially in countries with significant ethnic Russian populations such as the Baltics, Eastern Ukraine, and Transnistria in Moldova. Populations in Crimea,

⁷¹ Mikhail Dmitriev, “Lost in Transition? The Geography of Protests and Attitude Change in Russia,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 2: 224-243 (2015): 224-243.

⁷² Shevtsova, “Forward to the Past,” 31.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

⁷⁴ Woo Pyung-Kyun, “The Russian Hybrid War in the Ukraine Crisis: Some Characteristics and Implications,” *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 27, no. 3 (2015): 383-384.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 383.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 390.

Abkhazia, and South Ossetia respond similarly. Lastly, it appeals to those frustrated by mainstream media's political leanings. This is evident among Westerners, including Americans, who are willing to consider challenges to news sources or who are simply unaware of the information's origin.⁷⁷ As part of its disinformation campaign, the Kremlin propagates the Russophobia concept. Reuters Luciano Kim says that “‘Russophobe’ has become a convenient label for anyone who disagrees with Russian President Vladimir Putin’s aggressive behavior at home and abroad.”⁷⁸

Countering Russian disinformation can be a serious challenge. Direct confrontation with the false narrative tends to backfire because it unintentionally substantiates the myth by appearing to be a tacit acknowledgement. Many choose to believe the polished Russian version because of apprehension toward the true version. Of course, many believe Western media over Russian media. Strengthening the West’s positive message seems to be the most effective countermeasure. This is because if only the Russian media is perpetuating a myth, its authenticity is questionable. Whereas, if the Western message comes from various independent media sources, it is much more difficult for Kremlin propagandists to refute through a contrived Russian storyline.⁷⁹

Ostrovsky describes how Crimea was an opportunity for Russia to overcome the negative perception of the *Maidan* situation in Kyiv during the Sochi Olympics. Putin believed it to be a Western plot to discredit him and the Olympics. His government decisively recaptured and subsequently annexed Crimea. This created the appearance that

⁷⁷ Shevtsova, “Forward to the Past,” 30-33.

⁷⁸ Lucian Kim, “The Great Debate: Do You Suffer from Russophobia? The Kremlin Thinks You Might,” *Reuters*: Edition United States, Reuters News Agency, (March 7, 2016), <http://blogs.reuters.com/great-debate/2016/03/07/do-you-suffer-from-russophobia-the-kremlin-thinks-you-might/> (accessed October 11, 2016).

⁷⁹ The author observed these challenges dealing with Russian misinformation first-hand while working overseas in an official capacity.

such action was Russia's birthright, which immediately boosted Putin's popularity ratings to 90% as "volunteers" challenged the Ukrainian "fascists."⁸⁰ Shevtsova points out that this has happened before when "the Kremlin has tried to deflect attention from its problems" during "the Second Chechen War in 1999, and...the five-day war with Georgia over Abkhazia and South Ossetia in mid-2008."⁸¹ She also points out that "in the course of its military-patriotic campaign, the Russian regime has been able to militarize the media (especially television), turning media organs into war-propaganda outlets."⁸²

Despite Kremlin media successes, few Russians follow the narrative blindly. The masquerade has limits. Reliable Levada Center polling demonstrate that a majority (over 60 percent) no longer trust Russian state media.⁸³ The Washington Post's Michael Birnbaum says that despite Putin's high ratings, few believe that Russia is heading in the right direction, and a minority support the regime's international ambitions.⁸⁴ Journalist Anna Nemtsov explains that Putin's ratings are simply support for the "tsar," not really for him, and any leader would enjoy similar ratings until things become difficult.⁸⁵ Polling data confirms this since even during the 2011-2012 antigovernment protests, the largest in Russia's history, Putin's approval ratings remained over 60 percent.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ Ostrovsky, 313-320.

⁸¹ Shevtsova, "Forward to the Past," 24.

⁸² Ibid., 31.

⁸³ Levada Center, "Institutsionalnoe Doverie (Institutional Trust)," *Levada Center*: (October 13, 2016), <http://www.levada.ru/2016/10/13/institutsionalnoe-doverie-2/> (accessed February 1, 2017); The Levada Center is the only independent polling center in Russia, and is recognized internationally for reliability since the 1990s. Despite its reputation, it was recently declared a "foreign agent" by the government.

⁸⁴ Michael Birnbaum, "How to Understand Putin's Jaw-Droppingly High Approval Ratings" *The Washington Post* (March 6, 2016), https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/how-to-understand-putins-jaw-droppingly-high-approval-ratings/2016/03/05/17f5d8f2-d5ba-11e5-a65b-587e721fb231_story.html?utm_term=.7df2089539a1 (accessed November 14, 2016).

⁸⁵ Anna Nemtsova, "Is Putin as Popular as Trump Says?" *The Daily Beast*, (September 9, 2016), <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/09/09/is-putin-as-popular-as-trump-says.html> (accessed November 14, 2016).

⁸⁶ Birnbaum, citing Levada Center polling data.

2.4.4. The Politics of Energy and Costs of Expansionism

Shevtsova describes Russia as, “a weird hybrid of a petro-state with nuclear weapons and neo-imperialist and militarist ambitions.”⁸⁷ Russia has used its energy monopoly to blackmail other countries, most notably Ukraine, but also the EU.⁸⁸ However, this manipulative policy appears to have backfired. Although much of the EU is still dependent on Russia for fuel needs, many countries are seeking alternative energy sources and strategies. In early 2017 Russia’s government acknowledged that even OPEC’s agreement to limit output will not create long-term growth because of increased production in the U.S. and elsewhere.⁸⁹ Falling oil prices and America’s fracking gas boom could not have come at a worse time for Russian geopolitical ambitions.

The Russian government’s ambitions have come at a price, and it is a price that appears to be too dear to sustain. Shevtsova explains that “Russia will have to pay for the revival of its quasi-empire, however, and escalating economic troubles will soon render the Kremlin’s imperial ambitions too heavy a burden for the country’s budget.”⁹⁰ In 2016 Russia was the world’s fourth worst economic performer.⁹¹ These troubles translate to a worsening Russian economy, which at a time when many Russians are complaining about incomes, work challenges and unemployment, creates a huge challenge for the current government to maintain its popularity and hold on power.

⁸⁷ Shevtsova, “The Next Revolution,” 254.

⁸⁸ Kanet, “The Failed Challenge to Russia’s Revival,” 510-511.

⁸⁹ Interfax, “Oil Prices have Reached Equilibrium, No Point in Expecting Long-Term Growth,” *Interfax*, Russia & CIS Energy Newswire (January 13, 2017).

⁹⁰ Shevtsova, “Forward to the Past,” 27.

⁹¹ Andre Tartar, Catarina Saraiva, and Cynthia Li. “Meet 2016’s Worst Economic Performers,” *Bloomberg Markets* (January 11, 2016), <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-01-11/meet-2016-s-worst-economic-performers-flirting-with-disaster> (accessed October 14, 2016).

Chapter 3: What Would Trigger a Russian Revolution?

Russia can escape the civilizational trap into which it has fallen only by means of a revolution that would dismantle the system and create a new chance to build a rule-of-law state.

Lilia Shevtsova¹

As presented in the introduction, the thesis of this paper is that continued government repression of the human rights and individual freedoms of its citizenry, in combination with economic and other challenges could lead Russia toward revolutionary regime change. This chapter discusses how such a political change might occur. Despite the fact that the U.S. government, NATO, and its allies are correctly treating Russia as a threat, all must be prepared to respond to support Russia if a revolution occurs. Russian history demonstrates a clear propensity for revolutions. Repression provides Russians with little recourse and creates a potential powder keg of constrained rage. Although Russians are a tough and adaptable people, under the right conditions, as throughout history, Russians have used revolutions to change unpopular regimes.

As previously discussed, despite the Kremlin-controlled media's success at manipulating the narrative, many Russians are losing faith in their government's international course. Despite what many Westerners believe, Putin's popularity rating is not his personally, but rather the popularity of the *tsar*, any stable ruler.² Russian history displays many examples when support of popular rulers quickly fades in times of domestic strife. Russia's economic situation today is the epitome of such strife; when

¹ Lilia Shevtsova, "The Authoritarian Resurgence: Forward to the Past in Russia," *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 2 (April 2015): 34, <http://www.journalofdemocracy.org/article/authoritarian-resurgence-forward-past-russia> (accessed September 18, 2016).

² Anna Nemtsova, "Is Putin as Popular as Trump Says?" *The Daily Beast*, (September 9, 2016), <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/09/09/is-putin-as-popular-as-trump-says.html> (accessed November 14, 2016).

people cannot put food on the table, stability is not guaranteed.

Several conditions create potential for revolution, and Russians, who have experienced a freer, more open society might rightly insist on having their voices heard. The literature on this question is clear – most frequently, researcher assessments indicate a belief that Russia will become a liberal democracy sometime in the future. Where the assessments differ is on how and when this might happen. Some believe that only after a series of autocratic leaders, perhaps worse than Putin (even from within his own inner circle), the Russian people will finally achieve freedom.³ This paper discussed the government's ideology which created Russophobia, the problem with Russian nationalism, the idea of New Russia, and its sphere of influence.

The next section of this paper will consider what other elements and variables are necessary for revolution, and it will argue that these conditions either currently exist or are likely to exist in the future. Specifically it will examine the most recent political protests in Russia and compare these movements with the revolutionary movements over the past few decades.

3.1. Talking about Revolution: Protests, Uprisings, and Revolutions

Revolutions have occurred throughout history and are certainly nothing new. As discussed in Chapter 1, Russia's historical experience shows a significant predilection for revolution, in particular during the 20th Century into the new millennium. At various times through history, revolutions seemed to show a particular character. After World

³ Vladimir Gel'man, "Political opposition in Russia: A Troubled Transformation," *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 2: 177-191 (2015): 188, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2014.1001577> (accessed September 7, 2016).

War II, the U.S. and its allies were concerned about the rise of communist revolutions. More recently, revolutionary movements have given rise to new governments worldwide like the Color Revolutions, the Arab Spring, and the *Maidan* uprising. The American view is that if democracy results, then it was a success, although conversely, the Russian view is that pro-Russian Crimean and Eastern Ukraine movements represented a “Russian Spring.” When considering the potential of significant change in Russia, it is important to analyze recent protests. This section discusses protests that changed regimes in other countries, the Russian protests in response to fraud, and Russia’s major economic and other challenges. This is relevant when considering if Russia’s tremendous problems will result in future protests that could eventually bring down the regime.

The protests in December 2011 came as a surprise to Russian authorities.⁴ In 2011 and 2012, Russians participated in more anti-government protests against the Putin government than ever before in record-breaking numbers. Julia Sweet of Rutgers University says that due to voting irregularities and corruption during elections, protests occurred “in many Russian cities, headed and inspired by civil movements and non-governmental organizations. The number of protesters varied significantly, from as few as 5,000 to as many as 120,000.”⁵ Many protestors organized with the slogan, “Russia without Putin.”⁶ Dmitry Shlapentokh, Associate Professor of history at Indiana University, contends that these protests mirror the protests a century ago during the Russian Revolution, “reminders of the beginning of the last century when the wave of

⁴ Lilia Shevtsova, “The Next Russian Revolution,” *Current History* 111, no. 747: 251-257 (2012): 254.

⁵ Julia Sweet, “The Russian Orthodox Church and Social Movement Protests: Is Unity Possible?” *International Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Society* 5, no. 4: 77 (2015): 79.

⁶ Shevtsova, “The Next Revolution,” 254.

ethnic violence and social/political shake-ups led Russia to its first revolution.”⁷

Shlapentokh says that these revolutionary-like protests made the Kremlin nervous.⁸

The so-called “Color Revolutions,” specifically the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia, the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, and the 2005 Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan were largely peaceful democratic movements in countries of the former Soviet Union. The Russian government, however, viewed them as a threat to its own sovereignty since each had Western support and each forced authoritarian leaders to step down. Richard Kanet of the University of Miami presents a skeptical view of these revolutions noting that each of these country’s previous leaders had working relationships with Moscow, and Moscow actively worked to reverse the revolutions’ effects during the five years that followed. Kanet notes that similar to the Color Revolutions, the EU’s Eastern Partnership with six post-Soviet states increasingly conflicted with Russian interests.⁹ It is clear that Putin was concerned about the Color Revolutions and the Euromaidan protests since each overthrew its country’s autocrat. Journalist David Satter explains that Moscow regarded Ukrainian events as a threat, and Russia’s invasion of Crimea was largely orchestrated to distract Russians from domestic problems.¹⁰

The conditions in countries that have undergone a revolution provide important points of comparison because they reflect remarkable similarities with Russia’s current sociopolitical environment. Donnacha Ó Beacháin, Dublin City University, and Abel

⁷ Dmitry Shlapentokh, “The Image of the Russian Revolution on Russian TV,” *Contemporary Review* 294, no. 1706: 289-298 (2012): 289.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 298.

⁹ Roger E. Kanet, “The Failed Western Challenge to Russia’s Revival in Eurasia?” *International Politics* 52, no. 5: 503-522 (2015): 510.

⁹ Shevtsova, “Forward to the Past,” 22.

¹⁰ David Satter, *The Less You Know, the Better You Sleep: Russia’s Road to Terror and Dictatorship under Yeltsin and Putin*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 151-154.

Polese, University of Edinburgh, are both Marie Curie fellows who compiled research on the Color Revolutions. Although their research focused on the Color Revolutions in former Soviet states, they identified similar characteristics shared among revolutions in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. Their findings identified several commonalities in the revolutions studied. First, rulers maintained authoritarian control, despite promising reforms and more freedoms. Second, significant socioeconomic division existed between the ruling class and the ordinary citizen as well as other economic challenges. Third, these governments were notoriously corrupt with weak legal systems. Fourth, all arose from fraudulent national elections. They also identify five specific variables that contribute to a revolution's success or failure: the state's character before protests, the opposition, external influences, civil society, and the people.¹¹

Professor of Political Science and International Affairs at George Washington University Sharon Wolchik argues that even though the 2011-2012 Russian protests did not result in regime change, a revolution may still be possible. All the color revolutions suffered early failures, and “every successful case featured at least one failed ‘dress rehearsal.’”¹² She concludes that although obstacles are formidable, other protests have defeated regimes even when conditions appeared insurmountable, raising the possibility that Russia could change too.¹³ Shevtsova agrees, noting that Russian “society is awakening and sooner or later will face a moment of truth.”¹⁴ She is also skeptical of Putin who, “...will never voluntarily give up his monopoly on power, and his team is not

¹¹ Donnacha Ó Beacháin and Abel Polese, eds. *The Colour Revolutions in the Former Soviet Republics - Successes and Failures* (Auckland: Pindar NZ, 2010), 7.

¹² Sharon L. Wolchik, “Can there be a Color Revolution?” *Journal of Democracy* 23, no. 3: 63-70 (2012): 65.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁴ Shevtsova, “The Next Revolution,” 251.

going to carry out either political or economic reform.”¹⁵ University of Helsinki and European University’s Vladimir Gel’man believes that Russia will be free, but these protests movements did not offer coherent alternative solutions to the current regime.¹⁶

Evgeny Gontmakher and Cameron Ross of Moscow’s Institute of World Economy and International Relations and the University of Dundee respectively, reviewed the protests in Russia from 2011-2013 from the perspective of socioeconomic class. They describe “a tidal wave of mass protest movements [that] swept through the capital and then engulfed scores of Russia’s regions,” shocking the government. The Russian middle class, which represents 15 to 40 percent of the population (depending on the parameters), had had enough.¹⁷ Russian declining economy means that a significant part of the middle class has fallen below the poverty line. Gontmakher and Ross express the danger that this poses to the regime since 50 percent of the now former middle class work in the state sector, “...middle class allegiance to a regime can quickly evaporate if the powers and privileges of its members come under attack.”¹⁸

3.2. Money Problems and Corruption

Economic challenges in Russia are significant. As noted above, financial collapse will affect the way that Russians view their government. The fall in oil prices, economic sanctions, and corruption all conspire to move Russia into a hopeless situation.

Economist Sergei Guriev predicts that Russia will run out of its strategic foreign currency

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Gel'man, 190.

¹⁷ Evgeny Gontmakher and Cameron Ross, “The Middle Class and Democratisation in Russia,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 2: 269-284 (2015): 269-270.

¹⁸ Ibid., 282.

reserves by mid-2017. Although Russia improved its business climate, the geopolitical situation and ongoing military operations keep investors away while real reform in privatization and the de-monopolization of industry has not taken place.¹⁹ Exacerbating Russia's economic challenges is its rampant corruption, which Putin himself acknowledges as a challenge to its strategic success and viability. But with Putin and his cronies controlling 35% of the nation's wealth, corruption permeates society from the top down. Satter explains that as wage cuts and layoffs increase, "a weakening economy deprives the population of its most important reason for ignoring the elites' corruption."²⁰

In a situation where Russia should consider budget cuts, its huge increases in military spending from 2008 continues, which only worsens a bad situation and is unsustainable without cutting into critical domestic programs that support its population.²¹ Some patriotic Russians may view military spending positively, but this is only a short-term effect. Once citizens note a precipitous decline in public services and support, their perspective will change.

3.3. A Society in Decline

The demographics of an aging and declining population will force government spending toward healthcare and pensions that Russia can ill afford, especially considering that the workforce is declining more rapidly than the rest of the population. Binge drinking of hard alcohol is an accepted societal norm in Russia, which contributes to a

¹⁹ Sergei Guriev, "Russia's Constrained Economy," *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 3: 18-22 (2016): 18-19, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2016-04-18/russias-constrained-economy> (accessed October 15, 2016).

²⁰ Satter, *The Less You Know*, 151-154.

²¹ Dmitri Trenin, "The Revival of the Russian Military," *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 3: 23-29 (2016): 29, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2016-04-18/revival-russian-military> (accessed October 15, 2016).

high instance of fatal injuries and cardiovascular disease.²² George Michael of Westfield State University, refers to the Russian “Womb Bomb” of declining population due to a high death rate and low birth rate. Michael says that by the end of the century, Russia’s Slavic Orthodox majority may disappear due to the rapid rise of the Central Asian Islamic population and ethnic Chinese populations.²³ Leonid Rybakovskii of the Institute of Social and Economic Research concludes that the best way to improve the Russian demographic decline is to reduce the mortality rate.²⁴ Unfortunately, health care improvements to increase longevity costs more than is being invested. The following chart provides specifics on 2016 data.²⁵

| <u>Category</u> | <u>Russia</u> | <u>U.S.</u> | <u>EU</u> |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|
| Total Life expectancy (male/female) | 70.8 (65/76.8) | 79.8 (77.5/82.1) | 80.2 (77.4/83.2) |
| Death rate (per 1000) | 13.6 | 8.2 | 10.2 |
| Birth rate (per 1000) | 11.5 | 12.5 | 10.1 |
| Fertility rate (per woman) | 1.61 | 1.87 | 1.61 |
| Infant mortality rate (per 1000) | 6.9 | 5.8 | 4 |
| Population growth rate | -0.06% | 0.81% | 0.23% |

In addition to the decline of the middle class, the income disparity between urban

²² Nicholas Eberstadt, “Drunken Nation,” *World Affairs* 178, no. 2: 34-47 (2015): 44-46, <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/drunken-nation-russia%E2%80%99s-depopulation-bomb> (accessed October 16, 2016).

²³ George Michael, “Is a Greater Russia Really so Bad?” *Military Review* 95, no. 1: 99-115 (January-February 2015): 102, http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/MilitaryReview/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20150228_art018.pdf (accessed October 26, 2016).

²⁴ L.L. Rybakovskii, “Rezultaty sovremennoi demograficheskoi politiki rossii (The Results of Russia's Current Demographic Policy),” *Narodonaselenie (Sociological Research)*, 54, no. 1 (2014): 4–18, Trans. Kim Braithwaite, English version, Taylor & Francis Ltd., *Sociological Research*, vol. 54, no. 1, 1–19 (January-February 2015): 1.

²⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, “CIA World Factbook,” *Central Intelligence Agency*, CIA.gov, updated November 2016, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/us.html> (accessed December 22, 2016).

and rural and the have and have-nots is also significant and will only be exacerbated in an economic crisis. Emigration and Russia's brain-drain compounds this problem, which led Putin himself to complain, "Foreign organizations [are] 'working like a vacuum cleaner' to lure skilled Russians."²⁶

3.4. Positive Signs in the Current Government

Although criticism abounded on the U.S.'s "reset" with Russia in 2009 because of its limited impact, some areas achieved real success. The most notable was the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) in 2010, which reduced the number of strategic nuclear missile launchers by half. The U.S. and Russia also collaborated on the Iranian nuclear issue as well as the reduction of chemical weapons use in Syria.²⁷

A key freedom which still exists in Russia is the free market. Despite challenges, Putin's regime actively supports legislation and conditions favorable to expanding commerce. The government set a goal to bring Russia from 120th in 2012 on the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index into the top 50 by 2015 and the top 20 by 2018. The top 20 is not likely, but remarkably by 2015 Russia was 51st.²⁸ Despite only modest successes in recent years, the Russian government understands that it will not succeed without financial liberty. This, of course, is a paradox in an authoritarian society, but not without contemporary successful examples, most notably China. But Russia is no China, and lip service to real reforms cannot sustain the contracting Russian economy.

²⁶ Carol Matlack, "Putin's Isolation Spurs Russians Westward," *Bloomberg Businessweek*, no. 4448: 13-14 (2015): 13-14.

²⁷ Kanet, 512.

²⁸ Guriev, 20-21.

Chapter 4: Refutation – Could Revolution Happen?

The Revolution does not need historians.

– Lenin’s response to Maxim Gorky’s plea for Tsar Nicolas’ life¹

The previous chapters discussed why a revolution might take place in Russia. Chapter two discussed Russia’s historic propensity for revolution, its recent experience with democratic freedoms, and how the current government has dismantled those freedoms. It described Putin’s ideology to maintain control through false narrative, restrict media and individual freedoms, and impose its will through its energy monopoly. Chapter three described how revolutions in parts of the former Soviet Union erupted and discusses protests in Russia. It considered the difficulty of maintaining control when strapped with severe economic challenges and rampant corruption. These problems are compounded by the irreversible demographic decline, a dwindling middle class, and significant income disparity. Chapter three ended by highlighting successes working with the current Russian government and the areas where success has been tangible. This chapter discusses arguments against the thesis.

Russia projects a strong international image so some might question why Russia might undergo some kind of a revolution. However, this view ignores the weaknesses outlined in the previous chapters. Given the state of affairs in Russia, how it can continue warrants discussion. Shevtsova notes that “the Russian system of personalized power, the antithesis of a state based on the rule of law, is demonstrating an amazing capacity for

¹ William Clarke, *The Lost Fortune of the Tsars*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 93.

survival even in the midst of advanced stages of decay.”² The Russian government continues to challenge world order, which it sees as multipolar. Appearing weak is anathema to Putin’s nature so he may not be willing to change tactics. Despite weaknesses seen under the tough veneer, the Russian regime continues to challenge Western politics and interests. But is this really success?

Russia’s military strength is significantly better than it was just a decade ago, but how long Russia will be able to pay, equip, train, or even feed its troops is unclear. International operations are expensive, especially considering the costs of Russia’s campaign in Syria. Even if Russia has unknown reserves or other financing to maintain its force, the government cannot continue to meet lofty military goals if basic public needs are not met. The \$400 billion bilateral natural gas agreement with China is no panacea for Russia’s economic woes. The agreement is for 30 years with implementation in 2018, pending major infrastructure improvements and declining demand.³

Some may point to other countries as examples of maintaining strength through repression and state control, but these comparisons do not work in Russia’s context. Despite elimination of many freedoms in Russia, some protests continue, the market remains open, and most Russians can travel. This shows that Russia cannot close off society like North Korea. It also lacks the human capital, not to mention the finances of China. Russians are tough, but having seen the failures and horrors of previous regimes, it is doubtful that the population will willingly endure the incredible hardships in its

² Lilia Shevtsova, “The Authoritarian Resurgence: Forward to the Past in Russia,” *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 2 (April 2015): 22, <http://www.journalofdemocracy.org/article/authoritarian-resurgence-forward-past-russia> (accessed September 18, 2016).

³ Neil Buckley, “Sino-Russian Gas Deal: Smoke without Fire,” *Financial Times*, May 11, 2016, <https://www.ft.com/content/eea4f2ec-16c0-11e6-b197-a4af20d5575e> (accessed December 26, 2016).

future without a challenge. Yeltsin's role in creating the Russian Federation is the most recent example of the Russian people's action to effect change in government. To some, this may not appear to be a revolution, but the ideological and political change bolstered by popular support demonstrate that, in reality, it was. The government, despite authoritarian leanings and potential for extrajudicial killing to maintain power, has not shown that it will repress its people to the extent required to silence its citizenry. In fact, Russian people still enjoy some degree of international exposure, including relatively open communication and free travel, despite living in a *not free* society.⁴ In other words, the Stalinist Soviet Union no longer exists and is not likely to return.

Russia has legitimate strategic security interests that factor into its behavior. Kaliningrad and Crimea extend Russia's military reach, perhaps to counter NATO. Georgetown University Eurasian, Russian, and East European Studies Director Angela Stent believes that the West should not have been surprised by Russian military actions. Putin has been clear that Russia intends to maintain its traditional sphere of influence in the former republics, and actions in Georgia, Eastern Ukraine, and Crimea reflect this intent.⁵ Brookings Institution Senior Fellow Marvin Kalb agrees, highlighting that NATO's consideration of expansion into Georgia was provocative.⁶ Royal United Services Institute International Security Studies Director Jonathan Eyal argues that

⁴ Freedom House, "Freedom in the World Comparative and Historical Data: Individual Country Ratings and Status, FIW 1973-2016, Russia." Freedom House (2016), <https://freedomhouse.org/report-types/freedom-world> (accessed September 24, 2016).

⁵ Angela Stent, "Putin's Power Play in Syria," *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 1: 106-113 (January 1, 2016): 106-108, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2015-12-14/putins-power-play-syria> (accessed November 25, 2016).

⁶ Marvin Kalb, *Imperial gamble; Putin, Ukraine, and the New Cold War* (Brookings Institution Press, 2015): 229, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7864/j.ctt15hvrbc> (accessed November 28, 2016).

NATO enlargement humiliated Russia and created the rift with the West.⁷

Some question the likelihood of a revolution and believe that the Russian people are prepared to weather difficult conditions. On the question of whether or not a revolution in Russia can be predicted, one has only to look back at the collapse of the Soviet Union. No one predicted it. Vladimir Shlapentokh of the University of Michigan and journalist Anna Arutunyan highlight that no one who should have anticipated it actually did: not politicians, not journalists, not intelligence officers, not Sovietologists, not Gorbachev, not high-level Soviet officials in the know, and not the Russian people. They contrast the similarity with the Russian Revolution of 1917 as a moment of “*déjà vu*.”⁸ Massive popular support for Yeltsin’s movement at the end of the Soviet Union demonstrates clearly that Russian citizens’ patience with their government has limits.⁹

Ultimately, the susceptibility of Russia to a revolution directly correlates with the contentment of its people. So far the government has been largely successful with putting forward its own version of current affairs, but the extent to which Russians will remain satisfied with how they live is the real question. Blaming the West has worked but will not succeed forever. Even behind the Iron Curtain, people were not naïve. Today, Russians have seen and even experienced much more than in their Soviet past. Perhaps it is only a matter of time before the people decide they are not getting everything they want, and begin to desire, or even demand, a return of their freedoms.

⁷ Jonathan Eyal, *Who Lost Russia? An Enquiry into the Failure of the Russian-Western Partnership* (London: Royal United Services Institute, 2009), 40-42.

⁸ Vladimir Shlapentokh and Anna Arutunyan, *Freedom, Repression, and Private Property in Russia*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press 2013), 191-192.

⁹ Country Watch, “Russia – 2016 Country Review,” Country Watch Incorporated (2016), 268, 20-21, <http://www.countrywatch.com/Intelligence/CountryReviews?CountryId=142> (accessed October 7, 2016).

Chapter 5: Recommendations and Conclusion – Russian Style

The highest form of jihad is to speak the truth in the face of an unjust ruler.

– Prophet Muhammad¹

This paper does not pretend to predict the future, nor can it guarantee that a revolution is going to occur without question. Rather, it attempts to explain the current situation in Russia today, demonstrate that revolutions are quite common for Russian government transitions, and that a Russian revolution is not as remote as some might think. Although Putin's past wins remain largely uncontested, the worsening economic climate, the increased isolation, and the continued negative trends in Russia's international relations may lead the repressed and discouraged population to challenge the regime in the 2018 Presidential elections. That may or may not be the case, but regardless, the West must be prepared for any eventuality.

Recent Russian government actions seem to indicate that rather than declining, Russia is flexing its power in global affairs. However, given Russia's many economic and political crises at home, this could be more a sign of desperation than success. A desperate Russia is not in anyone's interest. The Russian government's only visible strengths are its military and its success in promoting its own narrative through consistent, if not factual, messaging. No one wants extreme measures to be taken over insignificant clashes.

A recent Levada Center poll shows that a significant majority of Russians (71

¹ New Statesman, "What does Revolution Mean to You?" *New Statesman* 142, no. 5181 (October 25, 2013): 41, <http://www.newstatesman.com/2013/10/what-does-revolution-mean-you> (accessed September 7, 2016).

percent) want rapprochement with the West.² Putin himself made an offer following the 2016 U.S. Presidential elections to cooperate with the United States. Taking advantage of this offer should be seriously considered in the interests of world security.

The United States can and must lead the world away from the current political confrontation. A Cold War mindset will lead to failure; Russia is not the USSR. America, NATO, and their allies must never concede to unreasonable demands, sacrifice principles, or allow Russia to dictate world order, but remaining aloof and unwilling to partner with Russia will not succeed either. Respecting Russian interests while seeking opportunities to engage, support, and encourage cooperation is key. Failure to recognize and respect Russian interests is the primary reason why previous administrations have not been successful. This is not to suggest capitulation in any form. Pressure must remain in place on Russia for its actions in Ukraine and other misdeeds, but the international community must look forward to reach a mutually beneficial arrangement.

This paper provides evidence that the current Russian government has the potential to self-destruct from within due to corruption and severe economic problems with theoretically revolutionary effects. But however change may occur, Russia's failure is not in anyone's long-term interests and could create more serious problems. Whether or not Putin stays in power, Western attempts to engage must continue. Diplomatic and security cooperation is paramount. Mutual respect and partnership is the key. Moscow and Washington have achieved success and can achieve more when working as equal

² Levada Center, "Rossiya i zapad (Russia and the West)," *Levada Center*: (November 29, 2016), <http://www.levada.ru/2016/11/29/rossiya-i-zapad-2/> (accessed November 29, 2016).

partners that respect each other's interests.³ In the past the U.S. and EU failed to recognize Russia's stated national interests, sometimes legitimate, and therefore bear some responsibility for today's challenges. The U.S. and the EU face significant challenges working with Putin's government, but building on successes with continued dialog will be critical to any successful re-engagement. As this paper has shown, some significant successes have occurred on the periphery, which demonstrates that the potential to collaborate exists.

5.1. Recommendations

1. Restore the U.S.-Russia bilateral relationship. It is time to reengage with Russia. The new U.S. Administration provides an opportunity to collaborate since Putin has offered to renew relations. Of course, Russia must meet its Minsk obligations in Ukraine, but this opening may lead to a successful détente and better engagement. The Administration should act on this offer, clarifying interests on both sides to the betterment of the relationship. Skeptics might point out that this has not worked for other administrations, but that is because in the past, both the U.S. and the EU did not recognize Russia's security concerns *vis-à-vis* NATO and its relationships with its near abroad. This will build trust and establish common ground with lasting effects.

2. Support the Russian government and its people. The first step is to work with the regime whenever possible while maintaining our values, keeping in mind that Russian stability and the ability to endure will weaken over time. Discontent in Russia

³ Angela Stent, "Putin's Power Play in Syria," *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 1: 106-113 (January 1, 2016): 107, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2015-12-14/putins-power-play-syria> (accessed November 25, 2016).

will likely increase because of economic stress, government corruption, and authoritarian rule. The United States and its allies need to be ready to support the Russian people, politically, economically, and in other ways should the regime fall due to a revolution, such as a popular uprising or a *coup d'état*. Of course, the U.S. needs to support Russia regardless of what the future holds. The U.S. and its allies must find ways to work with the current regime, but also prepare for Russia post-Putin. Future leadership may present even more complications than now, which makes ongoing engagement with all levels Russian government and society vital for world stability. This must include not only official dialog through diplomatic and other government to government means, but also in all sectors through business and other areas of mutual interest.

3. Maintain deterrence while restoring trust. Some aspects of the bilateral and multilateral relationship will remain challenging since the U.S. and allies must maintain strong positions regarding Ukraine and other issues. But the START program is an opportunity. Nations should take advantage of collaboration through this and other programs while dialing back hawkish rhetoric. Despite recent rifts, military to military contact can provide another opportunity for effective diplomatic engagement. U.S. military liaisons, Defense Attachés, Foreign Assistance Officers, and others, are critical now more than ever to build on these relationships and help restore trust.

4. Create new opportunities for people to people collaboration. Russia's true strength and most valuable resource is its people. Russians enjoy their freedoms and will not simply watch them disappear. Despite a dismantled Russian free press, increased travel restrictions, and limits to free speech, Russians will continue to find ways to get what they need as they always have. In part this will be through Russian ingenuity, but

the West also has an obligation to do what it can to support Russia. The once vast spectrum of bilateral and multilateral cooperation has not disappeared completely, and the West must build on previous successes to find new opportunities to strengthen relations and develop new areas of collaboration. Exchanges in the arts, business, culture, language, education, and many other areas should expand wherever possible. This is diplomacy on a people-to-people level, which builds powerful alliances over time.

5. Restore the positive image of the U.S. and Western allies. As noted earlier, Russian media as the Kremlin's mouthpiece is not widely believed within Russia, based on Levada Center polling.⁴ The U.S. and its allies must expand outreach and public diplomacy wherever possible. Limited Western media is often not accessible to monolingual Russians so the West should provide more Russian language sources and outreach. This will contribute to free speech, help to strengthen internet freedom, and extend free press platforms in the Russian-speaking world, providing a broader perspective. This will also strengthen democratic influence inside Russia. Russian diaspora, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations can also help amplify messages while providing a forum for Russians to find their voice.

5.2. Conclusion

Russia in 1991 was a new and exciting place, and there is a chance that Russia will eventually turn back toward the freer and more open society of its recent past. Engagement as a partner will be the catalyst. In the past, failure to recognize and respect Russian interests led to other political failures. The instability created by security tensions

⁴ Levada Center, "Institutsionalnoe Doverie (Institutional Trust)," *Levada Center*: (October 13, 2016), <http://www.levada.ru/2016/10/13/institutsionalnoe-doverie-2/> (accessed February 1, 2017).

between the West and Russia is palpable and must be addressed. There is hope. The spectrum of past cooperation was robust. Current limitations are frustrating, but the door is not closed. Creative ideas on ways to cooperate without compromising Western values or security is paramount.

Russia is an amazing wonderland of contradictions. Referring to the occidental/oriental paradox of Russia being a true Eurasian country, Russian historian B. L. Vul'fson notes, "for many long centuries, a great many things in Russia depended on which direction the ruler looked."⁵ Russian scholars claim that no one but a Russian can truly understand *ruskaya dusha*, the Russian soul. Maybe that is true. Winston Churchill was correct when he said that Russia "is a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma; but perhaps there is a key. That key is Russian national interest."⁶ And that is where things are today. True enough, Russia can probably be best understood in terms of the regime's *perception* of its national interests. However, it is wrong to discount the will of the Russian people. Russia is not completely ruled by its government. As during Soviet times, society was run by *babushki* – the Russian grandmas, much as it is today.

It is naïve to look at Russia as a mirror image. Vul'fson points out that "whole generations of Russians who grew up in almost complete isolation from the West."⁷ Despite Russia's love of Western culture, consumer products, and freedom, Russian society will ultimately decide its fate. Any change in Russia will be done *po-russkiy* – Russian style. No one should want it any other way.

⁵ B.L. Vul'fson, "Russia and Europe – the Fundamental Problem of the Russian Courses of History," *Russian Social Science Review* 51, no. 6: 4-18, Translated by Kim Braithwaite (2008): 10.

⁶ Winston Churchill. "The Russian Enigma," London: BBC Broadcast via The Churchill Society (October 1, 1939), <http://www.churchill-society-london.org.uk/RusnEnig.html> (accessed October 11, 2016).

⁷ Vul'fson, 17.

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